

House Judiciary Committee
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Testimony re HB 4131

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Good morning. I am Judith Kovach, Executive Director of the Michigan Psychological Association and a practicing psychologist. I am also the mother of an adopted daughter and the stepmother of an adopted son. In my 30 years of seeing patients in my practice, I have happily witnessed the joys of adoption, as well as tragic consequences when unmarried parents were prevented from adopting.

I am not here to convince any individual to change their beliefs about homosexuality or homosexual behavior. Nor am I here to talk about adoption "rights" in the abstract. I am here today to discuss what is in the best interest of the children of Michigan. . Protecting the welfare of children is, after all, the sole purpose of adoption legislation.

The evidence produced by psychological and other social science research overwhelming indicates that, all other factors being equal, children raised in a loving home are more likely to flourish physically, psychologically, intellectually, and socially, and that being raised by two loving parents has the added advantage of protection against some of the unforeseen circumstances of life such as unemployment or death of one parent. There are absolutely no legitimate data whatsoever indicating that children do less well in families with same-sex parents nor is there empirical data indicating that children raised with lesbian or gay parents are more likely to become homosexual. In fact, all of the voluminous research on children raised by lesbian and gay couples shows that these children are doing just as well as children raised by heterosexual couples on all manner of mental health criteria.

As a result of these very consistent scientific findings, virtually every creditable authority, including the prestigious American Academy of Pediatrics, the Child Welfare League of America, the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association and the National Association of Social Workers has determined that a parent's sexual orientation has absolutely nothing to do with the ability to be a good parent. These are the evidence-based reasons to support second parent adoptions regardless of whether the second parent is part of a same-sex or dual sex couple.raising the child.

However, despite the scientific evidence, second parent adoption legislation has been opposed in the past. Therefore, let us look at how opposing adoption by qualified parents hurts children. When an unrelated adult is allowed to adopt his or her partner's biological or adopted child, the child stands to gain increased emotional as well as financial and legal security. Denying a child the security of a legal relationship is likely to make the child feel less secure and "different" because that parent cannot consent to medical care, sign report cards, and do many other small and large things that only legal parents can do.

If second-parent adoption is denied, there are numerous ways in which a child might suffer. For example, a child can be denied health insurance because a non-adoptive parent cannot include them in his/her coverage. If the legal parent dies or becomes unable to care for the child, the child can be ripped away from the only other parent they have ever known.

All children develop strong bonds to their parents early in life, bonds psychologists refer to as attachment, which persist as children grow older. A child develops these strong psychological bonds to any adult who, on a continuing day-to-day basis, through interaction, companionship, interplay and shared experiences, fulfills the child's psychological and physical needs. When both members of a couple have shared involvement with a child, the child will develop a full attachment with both parents. Once these bonds have formed, continuity of the relationship with that parent is important for the child's healthy psychological and physical development. If the relationship is interrupted, children suffer separation distress and anxiety and a reduction in the quality of future attachments, which will be less trusting. Thus, a failure to give the child's second parent a legal status may damage a child's ability to form attachments through his/her life.

A study at the University of North Carolina compared children who had been adopted by a second parent with those who had not. Differences in income, race, gender and age of child, and mother's education, were taken into account statistically. The children adopted by second parents were 49% less likely to display negative affect, 57% less likely to have committed four or more delinquent acts and 33% less likely to have used illicit substances. This is hard scientific data, not an armchair guess nor a political opinion.

Whether some people like it or not, whether some people believe that lesbian and gay parents are "different" from other parents, the fact is that children are being raised in gay and lesbian households – and doing as well as children in heterosexual households – in terms of school achievement, peer relations, gender identity development, and mental health functioning. From the standpoint of children's psychological well-being, there is absolutely no rational basis or state interest in denying those **children** the same level of emotional, legal and financial security that children in heterosexual households are afforded.

The Michigan Psychological Association and its affiliated Michigan Project for Informed Public Policy strongly urge you to consider the scientific evidence, which is overwhelmingly in support of second parent adoption. The passage of HB4131 is therefore clearly aligned with the welfare of children in Michigan.